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Protect Your Family from Dangerous Carbon Monoxide Gas

Adams County Health and Human Services, Public Health Unit, urges people to use carbon monoxide detectors and perform regular inspections of gas heaters and appliances to guard against carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide detectors can be purchased at most hardware stores and function like smoke detectors, sounding an alarm if carbon monoxide levels are high enough to cause illness.

Carbon monoxide poisonings become more common during the fall and winter months when fumes from furnaces, wood stoves, fireplaces and kitchen ranges build up in tightly sealed homes. Fumes from portable heaters, charcoal grills and idling vehicles can also build up in a tent or cabin.

“Buying and installing carbon monoxide detectors in your home and having your heating system, gas range, fireplace and chimney inspected are the best steps you can take to avoid becoming a victim of carbon monoxide poisoning,” says Linda McFarlin, Health Officer.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas produced when fuels such as gasoline, kerosene, wood, coal, oil, natural gas and charcoal do not have enough oxygen to burn completely. Breathing carbon monoxide replaces the oxygen in the blood, making the person sick.

Carbon monoxide alarms should be placed in a central location, near bedrooms. If you have multiple floors in your home, a detector should be placed on each floor. Avoid putting alarms inside garages where initially high carbon monoxide can trigger false alarms. Also keep alarms away from doors and windows, where fresh air can cause a false low reading. Hunters, anglers and campers are advised to take a portable, battery-powered detector with them and keep it in their sleeping area.

To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Have your furnace, gas appliances, fireplace and chimney checked annually by a qualified professional to make sure they work properly and have adequate ventilation.
- Never use a gas oven to heat your home.
- Never allow an engine to run in an enclosed space, such as a garage. This includes cars, snowmobiles, motorcycles, space heaters and gasoline powered mowers, trimmers, chain saws or generators.
- Never ride inside a camper or trailer that is being towed by another vehicle.

Symptoms of low level exposure are often mistaken for the flu and include headache, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea and mental confusion. High levels of exposure may lead to more serious health problems, including loss of consciousness and death. If anyone in your home exhibits symptoms that clear up when they leave, carbon monoxide may be in the home.

For more information on carbon monoxide, visit the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services website at <http://dhfs.wi.gov/eh/Air/>.